

Toxic wastes buried in Metro-East landfill

By Timothy Middleton
Metro-East Journal Staff

Approximately 200 barrels of what pollution control officials call "low-level" toxic wastes have been buried at the MAL Landfill at Illinois 203 and Interstate 55-70 near Granite City.

State Environmental Protection Agency officials say the waste poses no pollution threat. About 11 truck-loads of the material that had been stored at the site since last November, however, had to be diverted to another part of the state because the Metro-East landfill is not considered a safe dumping ground for the hazardous material.

The barrels already buried at the landfill also have to be moved, the officials said.

EPA regional manager Kenneth Mensing in Collinsville described the material in the barrels as paint sludge, a flammable, poisonous substance dangerous enough that it must be buried under special conditions with specific authorization of the EPA.

Mensing said the material

would have been buried at the Wilsonville landfill designated for toxic wastes, but it has been closed by court order despite EPA insistence it is a safe storage area.

Both the Wilsonville and Granite City landfills are owned by SCA Services. Its officials could not be reached today.

The existence of the barrels was learned by the Metro-East Journal from a source claiming to be an employee of the landfill. He said he had seen material leaking from barrels stored on trucks formerly parked at the site.

He said he became alarmed after seeing a television news special on toxic wastes, "The Killing Ground," on Thursday.

The source said he did not know what the material was, but described it as foul-smelling.

"You can see by the office there (at the landfill) trailer-loads of barrels leaking hazardous materials," the source said. "If these barrels are leaking, naturally this stuff is leaking underground."

The EPA issued a special permit to the landfill to accept and dispose of the waste in November, Thomas Cavanagh, manager of landfill permits for the EPA, said today.

He said the barrels are buried at a part of the site that is underlain by more than 10 feet of relatively impermeable clay separating it from the water table, which supplies drinking water to numerous Metro-East communities.

There is "absolutely not" any cause for alarm, Cavanagh said. "We do not issue permits for people to pollute the groundwater; we issue permits so the groundwater is protected from pollution."

Mensing said that after the special permit was issued, landfill operators discovered a water-bearing strata of silt about five feet below the surface, and were forced to suspend operations.

He said the water could conceivably carry material leaking from the barrels to a point where it could pose a threat to surface or groundwater.

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